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ABSTRACT

Child Trends is a organization with the overarching mission of improving the lives of children and families by providing research-based information to inform policy and programs that affect children's lives and their future prospects. This annual report details the organization's accomplishments for the year 2001. The report begins with a letter from the president and the board chair highlighting the establishment of two new areas of research: early childhood development and child abuse, neglect, and family violence. The letter also accentuates the organization's research productivity, the expansion of the public information agenda, strengthening of the organization's infrastructure, the increased role of the board of directors in shaping organizational policy and direction, and the commitment to aggressively seek unrestricted funds. Following introductory remarks, the report highlights recent work to develop, analyze, synthesize, and disseminate research-based information on children and families, offering examples of work for: (1) the federal government, focusing on the impact of welfare reform on children and the development of fatherhood indicators; (2) states, stressing the impact of policy changes and monitoring state program outcomes; (3) cities and communities, including the documentation of progress and setbacks and applying research to reduce teen births in the District of Columbia; (4) foundations, featuring research on school readiness to inform funding decisions and research to inform youth development programs; and (5) the media, spotlighting the impact of welfare reform on teens, and providing information on the structure of the American family. The report concludes with lists of recent Child Trends publications, publications with Child Trends authors, the board of directors, executive staff, national advisory board, major funders, and Child Trends staff. (Contains 29 endnotes.) (KB)

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Annual Report 2001

RESEARCH IN THE SERVICE OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN

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Child Trends is dedicated to improving the lives of children and families. We do this by providing research and data to inform decision-making that affects children and their future prospects.

Child TRENDS

Annual Report 2001

Research in the Service of America's Children

Letter from the President and the Board Chair

2001 was a flourishing year for Child Trends, with our annual revenue approaching the $4-million mark and the number of staff reaching 50 – both for the first time. But Child Trends' growth and development go beyond such markers.

We have broadened our research focus by establishing **two new content areas**, one in Early Childhood Development, the other in Child Abuse, Neglect, and Family Violence. Research on these topics is not new to Child Trends, but now we have a formal structure in which to conduct this work. This will enable us to better provide policy makers, service providers, media professionals, and citizens with the objective information they need to make decisions and develop policies. For example, while the tragic stories of individual child abuse victims have been splashed over newspaper pages across the country, accurate data and analysis on child abuse and neglect are much harder to come by. Research and indicators of well-being developed through Child Trends' new content area will help close this gap.

Meanwhile, our **existing content areas** are continuing their high levels of productivity. For example, Child Trends' Welfare and Poverty researchers have been developing a steady stream of articles, research and policy briefs, and presentations on how welfare reform has affected children. These research products could not be more timely. The reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the centerpiece of the 1996 welfare reform law, comes before Congress this year, and the well-being of children is a central issue in the discussion. Nonpartisan, research-based information on the impact of welfare reform can inform and elevate the quality of the reauthorization debate.

We have expanded our **public information agenda**. Realizing that the value of our research is not limited to the social science community, we have advanced our efforts to communicate what we do – and why – to a broad audience. The support of several foundations and the expansion of our communications staff have given us the wherewithal to do so. The results are tangible: More research briefs translating Child Trends' findings into "plain English"; more outreach to the media and consequent media coverage highlighting the insights of Child Trends' experts; a new Child Trends general interest brochure; and an improved Child Trends Web site that provides the public with an easily accessible portal to information generated by our researchers.

We have also taken steps to strengthen Child Trends' **infrastructure** in several ways: purchasing new computers and servers; hiring an in-house full-time technology expert; adding video conferencing capacity; and obtaining additional office space for our expanding staff. Recognizing that our old management structure no longer fits an organization of Child Trends' current size, complexity, and aspirations, we have added three vice presidential positions: Vice President for Research, Martha J. Zaslow; Vice President for Internal Management, Richard Wertheimer; and Vice President for External Relations, Carol Emig.

There is more. In 2001, our **Board of Directors** took an increasingly active role in shaping Child Trends' policies and direction. A good example is the development of a new **strategic plan** for our organization. This initiative was launched by Board Vice Chair Eleanor V. Horne and carried out with the assistance of National Advisory Board member Jack Leone and Child Trends staff. The **National Advisory Board** is itself a recent creation. This group of influential individuals from varied backgrounds has expanded the pool of talent and energy available to us to move our organization forward.

Finally, we made a critical commitment in 2001 to aggressively seek unrestricted funds so that we always have the working capital available to seize opportunities to contribute to the nation's knowledge base. An internal Child Trends development team will lead this effort. We believe that the work of this organization is far too important to be hampered by fluctuating funding. The expansion of our funding base can send a powerful signal that not only is Child Trends here to stay, but that it will become stronger and enjoy greater flexibility to address critical issues as they arise in the years to come.

In the pages that follow, we provide recent examples of Child Trends' "Research in the Service of America's Children." As you read this report, we think you will gain renewed appreciation of Child Trends' ability to marshal its skills, knowledge, and will to broaden our understanding of children and how they and their families are faring. Beyond that, this report stands as a testament to the tremendous intellectual capital in this nation directed at the greater good. The world has changed a lot recently, but some things have not changed. And one of them is Child Trends' commitment to use our intellectual capital to improve the lives of children and their families. Our goal is to be the nation's leading resource for research and data on children and families. We know that we are privileged to be affiliated with an organization that is dedicated to this noble — and absolutely necessary — endeavor.

Kristin Anderson Moore
President

George M. Neely
Chair

Introduction

Americans find many ways to serve their nation. At Child Trends, our focus is on improving the lives of children and their families. We do this through rigorous research to inform decisions that affect children's current circumstances and their future prospects.

We believe that the best policies and practices are grounded in solid science – not easy assumptions or partisan opinion. Moreover, if our research never leaves bookshelves or file cabinets, we have failed in our mission. We intend for our research to be used – by the policy and practice communities, and beyond that, by the larger society.

This annual report highlights recent work by Child Trends to develop, analyze, synthesize, and disseminate research-based information on children and families. It offers examples of how Child Trends has provided data, insights, and tools to help decision-makers, funders, and opinion-shapers address and articulate the needs of children and families in this nation. Specifically, we look at some of Child Trends' work to inform and assist:

- the federal government;
- states;
- cities and communities;
- foundations; and
- the media.

Work for the Federal Government

Informing the Policy Debate
Example: Children and Welfare Reform

Speaking from a solid knowledge base about child development, we at Child Trends are keenly aware that what affects parents affects their children. Welfare reform is a good example. If parents' lives change through changes in welfare policies, the environment in which their children live will also be affected. This, in turn, may affect how children are faring.

For more than a decade, Child Trends has studied the impact of welfare reform on children. For example, we developed an analytic approach and measures for looking at how children are affected when their parents move from welfare to work in connection with the evaluation of an early version of welfare reform, the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Training Program. Before the federal government launched this evaluation[1] in the late 1980s, children were largely ignored in studies of welfare reform. Consequently, researchers tended to focus on such questions as what welfare reform meant in terms of caseloads, parental employment, and shifts in family income.

Child Trends played a pivotal role in enlarging this focus by helping policy makers and other researchers understand the value of including children in studies on the impact of welfare reform. And through the years, Child Trends itself has been a pioneer in developing such studies. As Congress prepares to reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, the centerpiece of the historic 1996 welfare reform law, our own studies and our review of other studies have shed important light on this issue.

What *have* we learned about how welfare reform affects kids? Quite a lot. And to the surprise of both those who extolled welfare reform and those who decried it, it's not a straightforward story. Consider these broad findings:[2]

- The promise of welfare reform has been partially fulfilled. More parents are working, the welfare rolls are down, and child poverty has declined. But even in the best of times – in the late-1990s, when the economy was booming – there is evidence that children in families affected by welfare reform were still at risk.

- Though welfare reform dramatically changed parents' lives, dozens of major indicators of child well-being (for example, health status and reading and math test scores) have showed little change. Children did not show substantial decline on these indicators, but they did not show solid improvement either. Also, disadvantaged children have continued to lag behind children in more affluent households on these measures. In sum, even though parents may have exchanged welfare checks for paychecks, their kids largely remained disadvantaged and at risk.

- Experimental studies of welfare-to-work programs provide additional insights into how children are faring when mothers, who had been receiving public assistance, enter or prepare to enter the work force. Results from these studies show:

- Although welfare-to-work programs most often resulted in no, or only weak, patterns of change for children, several exceptions have important implications for policy makers:

- First, when welfare-to-work programs resulted in both an increase in employment by mothers *and* increases in family income, children tended to fare better on behavioral, cognitive, and academic outcomes. When mothers failed to make a successful transition from welfare to work — when they couldn't get or keep a job — and their family income did *not* increase, welfare-to-work programs tended to have an unfavorable impact on these outcomes.

- Second, when welfare-to-work programs led to an increase in mothers' educational attainment, their children also tended to have somewhat better cognitive outcomes.

- Third, whereas some researchers thought initially that young children might be the ones most adversely affected by welfare reform, early evidence now suggests that adolescents may be bearing the brunt. When mothers participated in welfare-to-work programs, their teenage children were more likely to have problems in school and with their behavior than teens of mothers still receiving public assistance. [We caution, however, that no evaluations have been conducted on impacts for infants.]

- Finally, children in families that were new entrants onto welfare were more likely to be affected negatively by their parents' participation in welfare-to-work programs than were children of longer-term recipients. This evidence seems to call into question the assumption that welfare reform would be most stressful for families with the longest history of welfare receipt.

Developing Measurement Tools
Example: Fatherhood Indicators

Since its founding in 1979, Child Trends has been engaged in tracking trends in the well-being of children and families. Indeed, this activity explains our name. We use *existing* measures to track how children and families are faring, but we also work with other researchers within and outside the federal government to develop *new* measures of child and family well-being. After all, family life has changed dramatically in the last several decades; our measures of child well-being must also change and grow to keep pace with America's parents and children.

In this context, Child Trends has taken the lead in identifying and developing data on fathers and their place in children's lives. For example, we have collaborated with federal agencies to produce the first-ever compendium on fatherhood (and motherhood) indicators, scheduled for publication around Father's Day 2002.[3] In addition, we are coordinating the DADS ("Developing a Daddy Survey") Project, which involves developing fatherhood measures for national surveys and assembling questions to assess father involvement that can be used widely by others in the field.

Why should the federal government, or an organization that focuses on children, care about issues surrounding fatherhood? Because these issues are inextricably tied to the well-being of children and families, as research makes clear. Consider a sampling of these findings, as highlighted in an article by Child Trends researchers:[4]

- Children growing up in families headed by a mother *and* a father are five times less likely to live in poverty than children growing up in households headed solely by a mother.

- Children who do not live with their biological fathers are not only at a higher risk for poverty, but also for school drop out, incarceration, and teen pregnancy than children who live with both parents.

- Boys with absentee fathers are twice as likely as boys in two-parent families to be incarcerated, regardless of variations in their parents' educational level, race and ethnicity, and income.

- On the positive side, warm and supportive interactions with an engaged father or father-figure can benefit children both intellectually and socially. Indeed, fathers often play multiple roles in the lives of their children: as economic providers; caregivers and nurturers; moral teachers and role models; friends and playmates; monitors and disciplinarians; protectors; advocates; providers of emotional and practical support to mothers; and links to the extended family and the community.

Work for States

Weighing the Effect of Policy Change
Example: "Assessing the New Federalism"

Since 1995, Child Trends has worked in partnership with the Urban Institute on "Assessing the New Federalism" (ANF), a multi-year project to analyze the devolution of responsibility for social programs from the federal government to the states. A primary tool of analysis for the ANF is the National Survey of America's Families, which gathers information on more than 40,000 households in 13 selected states[5] and in the nation as a whole. Included in the survey are hundreds of questions on the economic, social, and health characteristics of children and adults under age 65. Through this initiative, data have been collected for 1997 and 1999. A third wave of data is being collected in 2002.

Within the ANF project, Child Trends is examining how children and families, particularly those in low-income households, are faring under devolution. At the start of the project, Child Trends recommended questions for inclusion in the survey that together would provide a large window into the lives of children and families during this era of policy change. Thus, we contributed questions to elicit information on such subjects as children's behavioral and emotional problems; children's health status; children's engagement in school; children's activities; parental aggravation; and parental religiosity.[6]

With most of the design work on the survey completed by 1997, we have turned our attention to analyzing the data collected from the survey, interpreting the results, and writing and disseminating policy briefs and discussion papers describing these results. For example, we have done studies examining how the well-being of low-income children varies across the 13 states.[7] In addition, we have compared the well-being of children in families that are still receiving welfare, those in families that have left welfare, and those in other low-income families with no history of welfare receipt.[8] And we've drawn on survey data to study topics as diverse as child care arrangements,[9] teen employment,[10] and women's attitudes toward having children out of wedlock.[11] As a complement to our analyses, we also participated in site visits to 12 of the 13 states to develop case studies of how devolution is unfolding in states and communities across the country.[12]

The National Survey of America's Families complements information from experimental studies. Data on a wide array of topics are made available rapidly. Among the findings:

- The family environments of low-income children and their more prosperous counterparts continue to show stark differences. Low-income children consistently experience disadvantages on all seven survey measures that assess family environment (among them: family structure, level of parental aggravation, and symptoms of poor parental mental health). Children in single-parent families are similarly disadvantaged.[13]

- Substantial variations exist in children's environments across the 13 states in the survey, with children in some states doing considerably better on these seven measures than children in the nation as a whole, and some doing worse. For example, on five measures,

- children in Minnesota outpaced the national average, while on several measures, children in California, New Jersey, and Texas lagged behind it.[14]

- On most measures of children's behavior and well-being, there were neither large improvements nor large declines from 1997 to 1999. Yet in 1999, as in 1997, low-income children continued to fare worse than did higher-income children on these measures. In 1999, for instance, low-income adolescents were two-and-a-half-times as likely as were higher-income adolescents to have been expelled or suspended from school in the previous year.[15]

Monitoring Program Outcomes
Example: South Carolina's "First Steps"

States and communities across the nation are showing renewed interest in school readiness, and for good reason. Research studies consistently show that children who are ready to learn when they enter school are more likely to do well academically in subsequent years than those who are not. Among the states that are taking such research findings to heart is South Carolina. Propelled by data showing that one in seven children in the state was assessed as "not ready" for first grade, in June 1999 Governor Jim Hodges signed into law a statewide early childhood initiative called *First Steps to School Readiness*. The state hired Child Trends to help design an assessment of programs implemented through this initiative by South Carolina's 46 counties.

As part of this work, Child Trends collaborated with South Carolina to create a conceptual model – a graphic planning tool – that illustrates the links between activities and contributing factors that may promote school readiness and the desired goal of the program: ensuring that every child in South Carolina enters first grade ready to learn. The model provides a way for *First Steps* program staff to think through how they want to monitor the effectiveness of the steps they are taking to enhance school readiness. Next, Child Trends will summarize initial data on South Carolina's school readiness programs for a report to the state legislature in January 2003.

In our work on school readiness for South Carolina and elsewhere in the nation, Child Trends has drawn on the extensive knowledge of staff regarding child development, as well as the specific research literature on school readiness, most notably, the recommendations of the National Education Goals Panel.[16] We summarized the findings from this literature for school system officials and members of the general public through a widely disseminated *Research Brief*.[17] Consider some of the key points from the brief:

- School readiness embraces three interrelated ideas: readiness in the child, readiness in the schools, and readiness in the family and community. All three components have a bearing on whether an individual child enters school prepared and able to learn and thrive.

- School readiness in children goes beyond children knowing their ABC's and 1-2-3's.

Such academic feats, while they may delight parents and grandparents, should not be considered the sole determining factors in whether a child is ready for first grade. Physical health and motor development are also important, as are social development (e.g., the ability to share and take turns) and emotional development (e.g., being able to understand others' feelings). Enthusiasm for learning, persistence on tasks, and the ability to listen and to express oneself are other parts of the school readiness matrix.

- Children will have a better adjustment in the early grades if they attend schools that encourage a smooth transition between home and school and strive for continuity between early childhood education programs and elementary schools.

- Community investments in children's health, family economic security, family stability, early childhood care and education, school transition practices, and neighborhood quality can help families and local schools be better prepared to educate their young children.

Work for Cities and Communities

Documenting Progress and Setbacks
Example: "The Right Start"

Child Trends prides itself on producing information that is *useful*, as noted in the introduction to this report. For example, we have worked closely through the years with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT initiative, which uses statistical indicators to track the well-being of children at the state and local levels. One result of this fruitful collaboration was the release of two reports in February 2001 on how children in states across the nation and in the 50 largest cities are doing on key measures of a healthy start to life between 1990 and 1998. The names of these reports, appropriately, were *The Right Start*.[18]

The well-publicized findings in these reports allowed policy makers, journalists, service providers, and interested citizens to see clearly how well – or how poorly – babies in their own jurisdictions were starting out life. Armed with this hard data, policy makers and service providers in the child development field were in a better position to make more informed decisions about where they should target their resources for maximum impact.

What did *The Right Start* tell us about babies born in the nation's largest cities, specifically? Generally, the findings remain troubling, though there were some encouraging signs. Consider these examples:[19, 20]

- While there were improvements in birth outcomes in the U.S. as a whole during the 1990s, this progress was not as visible in the nation's largest cities as it was elsewhere in the country. Several important measures of a healthy birth remained virtually unchanged in America's big cities during this prosperous decade, including the percentages of births in 1998 that were low birthweight, that were preterm, and that were to teen mothers.

- The variation across cities on selected measures is striking. For example, in six of the 50 largest cities (Baltimore, Cleveland, Memphis, Milwaukee, New Orleans, and St. Louis), births to teens accounted for more than 20 percent of total births in 1998. In contrast, in seven other large cities (New York, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, Honolulu, Seattle, and Virginia Beach), teen births that year made up less than 10 percent of total births.

- Although, overall, babies born in the nation's big cities in the 1990s continued to start life at a greater disadvantage than those born elsewhere in the U.S., there were measurable improvements that occurred in the last decade in some key indicators of a right start to life. For example, there were significant reductions in the percentage of mothers in the 50 largest cities who received late or no prenatal care. There was also a stunning drop in the nation's largest cities in the percentage of mothers who smoked during pregnancy – the only measure in *The Right Start* on which urban America outperformed the rest of the country.

Applying What We Know
Example: Reducing Teen Births in the District of Columbia

Since the early 1980s, teen childbearing has been central to Child Trends' research portfolio. Over the years, we have consistently and comprehensively documented and analyzed trends in the nation's teen pregnancy and birth rates through such products as our annual *Facts At A Glance* report. We published the latest of these reports in August 2001, providing data for every state and more than 100 large cities.[21]

But Child Trends' work to address the issue of teen childbearing goes beyond data collection, analysis, and dissemination. We are also applying what we know from basic research on child and youth development and program evaluations to help adolescents avoid childbearing and other consequences of early sexual activity. We began this applied research in our home community: Washington, D.C. Our research has identified four key predictors of early childbearing: early school failure, early behavior problems, family dysfunction, and early poverty.[22] We are using these findings to help develop strategies to prevent – or at least significantly reduce – teen childbearing in the District of Columbia.

For example, we are assisting, evaluating, and monitoring a teen pregnancy prevention program sponsored by Covenant House Washington, the local affiliate of the national faith-based organization that assists homeless and runaway youth. This Peer-Supported Prevention Program, as it is aptly named, trains teens in two low-income neighborhoods (Anacostia and Congress Heights) to help 5th-, 6th-, and 7th- grade students at elementary schools in the area confront the issue of teen pregnancy. Both neighborhoods are in Ward 8, which has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and childbearing in the city. Carrying a strong abstinence message, the older youth help the younger ones grapple with making responsible decisions about sexual behavior when they enter the teen years. At the same time, the program's activities reinforce the notion that young people have it within their power to make positive choices, not only about abstaining from sex, but in other arenas of their lives as well.

Since 1997, we have also provided research insights and technical assistance to the D.C. Partnership to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, a public-private, community-based initiative launched to tackle this pressing social problem. As part of this involvement, in June 2001 Child Trends convened a meeting of fellow researchers, local health providers, and potential funders to explore duplicating a Minnesota-based program called *Prime Time* in the District of Columbia. The program targets teen girls who have had a negative pregnancy test for special intervention services in light of research findings that they are at high risk for subsequent pregnancy and childbearing, as well as sexually transmitted infections.[23]

We are also working with the D.C. Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation to help this quasi-governmental entity refine its measures of how youth in programs funded through the Corporation are doing as a result of their participation. One of the outcomes to be measured for the Corporation-supported Youth Entrepreneurship Programs is a decrease in teen pregnancy.

What has Child Trends learned about effective strategies for reducing teen pregnancy from both basic and applied research, as well as practical experiences in the field? Consider the following lessons:

- "Early" is the operative word. *Early* on, investments must be made in children so that they will not want to become parents when they are still in their teens. High school – even junior high school – is too late for many kids. Teen pregnancy prevention programs should begin *early* in life, with initiatives such as the Abcedarian preschool program, and then continue throughout adolescence.

- These programs need to address the broader context of young people's lives. Are their lives full, fulfilling, and hopeful? Teens with plans for the future are less likely to jeopardize those plans by having a baby.

- Programs that just focus on one strategy for preventing teen pregnancy (such as didactic sex education) are likely to have limited success in reducing sexually risky behavior. The most effective approaches, especially among disadvantaged youth, are like the Children's Aid Society program, multi-faceted and long-term and take heed of factors as diverse as early childhood development, school readiness, academic progress, and physical, cognitive, and emotional health.

Work for Foundations

Informing Funding Decisions
Example 1: School Readiness

Foundations are often the driving force behind innovative social programs in the United States. Solid research can help foundation officials decide which types of programs and interventions are most worthy of support and why. Child Trends increasingly is providing this kind expertise to foundations that support programs to enhance children's lives. Our aim is to help inform these foundations' funding decisions, and in doing so, also develop information that states, communities, and service providers will find helpful in their own program development

One example of Child Trends' commitment in what is a relatively new arena for us is our work on school readiness for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. As part of this involvement, we conducted a comprehensive review of the research literature that focused both on factors that shape school readiness and evaluation studies of programs that aim to promote it.[24] We summarized these findings in a short *Research Brief* to help busy laypersons and policy makers develop an understanding of school readiness. (The *Research Brief* has been widely disseminated and used by communities and states such as in South Carolina's *First Steps* program described earlier in this report.) We also developed a logic model that helps people understand what making an investment in a particular school readiness program might be expected to accomplish over time. And we have been working with community leaders in Long Beach, California, on practical strategies to enhance school readiness.

To help anyone, anywhere who is interested in helping kids get a good start on learning, we also created a "What Works" table to depict graphically the most effective investments for school readiness, based on our literature review. Under a "What Works" column, we include activities or parts of interventions that have been examined with rigorous experimental methods and found to have a significant impact on school readiness. There's also a "What Doesn't Work" column that includes interventions or activities that have been experimentally evaluated and found ineffective. A "Mixed Reviews" column contains programs that have been shown to be effective in some, but not all, studies. This column also includes strategies that have been found to be effective for some groups of children, but not all. Finally, a "Best Bets" column describes investments that are important from a theoretical standpoint, from basic research studies, or from practical experience but which have not been thoroughly tested in rigorous experimental studies. The entire table is posted on the Child Trends Web site, and each cell in the table is linked to one or more paragraphs of explanation.[25] Visitors to the site can therefore determine what level of detail they want to access at any given time.

Child Trends is taking a similar approach to its new work for the Knight Foundation, which involves a close look at programs that address seven outcomes of adolescent well-being: mental health, physical health, emotional well-being, positive citizenship, reproductive health, social relationships, and education and skills. This project, likewise, involves conducting an intensive literature review and developing logic models and "What Works" tables as tools for foundation and community investments.

Example II: Youth Development Programs

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, which has a special focus on youth development, has also tapped Child Trends for research insights to help inform the foundation's funding decisions. This work has two major thrusts: 1) developing outcome measures that can gauge the effectiveness of youth development programs; and 2) identifying strategies to promote healthy youth development. Work to identify outcome measures involves posing three questions about youth outcomes of programs that are seeking funding from the foundation: Why is the outcome important? How can you measure the outcome? Can the outcome be changed? (An outcome might be educational attainment or holding a job, for example.) Child Trends has drawn on its research expertise to develop a compendium of information that will be used to help the foundation decide which programs to fund, as well as to evaluate programs once they have been funded.

The second thrust – identifying strategies that promote healthy youth development – complements the work Child Trends has been doing for the Knight Foundation. We have reviewed experimental evaluations of existing programs that aim to improve youth outcomes to see whether the evidence shows that the programs succeed in this intent. We then are synthesizing this information in reports and "What Works" tables. So far, we have looked at academic achievement programs, work preparation programs, civic engagement programs, and mentoring programs. Consider what we're finding about whether mentoring works, for example:[26]

- Mentoring does, in fact, improve a number of outcomes for at-risk kids. For example, youth who are mentored do somewhat better in school – they're absent less; they go to college more; and they behave better in school. Mentored youth are also less likely to use drugs or alcohol than kids who have not been mentored. Mentored youth seem to have better relationships with their parents and more positive attitudes toward the elderly and helping in general than youth who do not participate in mentoring programs.

- Not all mentoring "works." The best results come from long-term mentoring relationships (at least 12 months). Short-term relationships have the potential to actually hurt youth. Frequent contact is also important. When mentors fail to see their mentees on a regular basis, youth can be disillusioned and they are unlikely to accrue positive benefits from the relationship.

- Mentoring programs need structure, planning, training, and oversight to facilitate high levels of positive interaction between mentors and mentees. Good intentions aren't enough.

Work for the Media

Making News
Example: Impact of Welfare Reform on Teens

At Child Trends, we believe it is important not only to *produce* rigorous, nonpartisan research on children and families, but also to *communicate* it. Six years ago, Child Trends began to build a communications program. Since that time, we have steadily increased our ability to communicate research on children, youth, and families to the public policy community and the media. Over the past year, with the generous support of several foundations, we have scaled up these efforts, with considerable success. We have strengthened our relationship with reporters who cover children's and family issues, kept the media informed of our latest research findings through regular press releases and media advisories, produced op-eds for general newspapers, prepared commentaries for trade publications, and provided insights and "sound bites" for reporters on breaking news related to our areas of expertise.

Sometimes, Child Trends has itself been the source of such breaking news. A telling example of this was our July 2001 *Research Brief*, "Welfare Reform's Impact on Adolescents: Early Warning Signs."[27] Whereas many people predicted that young children might be most at risk when their parents moved from welfare to work, Child Trends broke new ground by presenting evidence that it is the *adolescent* children in these households that were more likely to have problems. The result was widespread national news coverage.

Consider a few excerpts from that coverage:

- "Early studies of families in three welfare-to-work programs have found unexpected evidence that their adolescent children have lower academic achievement and more behavior problems than the children of other welfare households. 'The findings are so surprising that they should wake us up and make us think more about what's happening to adolescents,' said Martha Zaslow, one author of the study, issued by Child Trends, a nonpartisan Washington research center." {"Surprising Result in Welfare-to-Work Studies," article by Tamar Lewin, *The New York Times*, July 31, 2001.}

- "When parents move from welfare to work, some of their adolescent children encounter unexpected difficulties…The problems of adolescents are an unanticipated contrast to the experience of younger children, who appear to benefit from parents joining the workforce. That's the conclusion of the study by Child Trends." {"Welfare Reform's Unexpected Difficulties," article by Laura Sessions Stepp, *The Washington Post*, July 31, 2001.}

- "When we ordered welfare mothers to go to work, who did we think was going to raise their kids? Not just the younger children, all playful and open, but the sullen, cynical teenagers, who were used to having mom around, much as they tried not to show it. Who's going to raise those kids? The question hangs in the air, the consequences clearly seen in the report released Tuesday by Child Trends, a nonpartisan research center." {"What about the teens?" commentary by Jane Eisner, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 2, 2001.}

Interpreting News:
Example: Putting "The Changing American Family" in Context

Child Trends has been a ready media resource for insights and information on trends affecting the American family. In recent years, for example, our researchers have fielded questions from reporters on topics as diverse as data showing a decline in the teen pregnancy rate and a Census Bureau report heralding the "comeback" of the two-parent family. In an April 2001 *Research Brief* titled "Births Outside of Marriage: Perceptions vs. Reality,"[28] and in subsequent media interviews, Child Trends researchers dispelled many inaccurate views about unmarried mothers (that they are almost exclusively teens or members of minority groups, for example). And when the Census Bureau released 2000 Census data showing a dramatic jump in the nation's Hispanic population, Child Trends produced a fact sheet for the media on the status of Hispanic children and families in the nation to put the data in context.[29]

Here are some examples from our clippings file of Child Trends in the news interpreting the news:

- On the policy implications of the burgeoning Hispanic population: "For too long, we have cast social policy almost exclusively in terms of black-white relations. The Census 2000 numbers documenting the explosive growth of the Hispanic population are a wake-up call to widen our focus. And part of this involves paying attention — really paying attention — to the children and families behind the numbers." {"Time to Take A Closer Look at Hispanic Children and Families," commentary by Kristin Anderson Moore in *Policy & Practice*, the Journal of the American Public Human Services Association, June 2001.}

- On a Census Bureau report on the living arrangements of children: "Whatever the reason, an increase in the number of children living with their biological parents bodes well for those children, said Kristin Moore, president of the research firm Child Trends. 'From the point of view of children, this is the most auspicious family form,' she said. Two-parent families raising their biological children tend to be better off economically, live in better neighborhoods and attend better schools, she said. 'They have the advantage of stability.'" {"American families: More traditional, more complex at the same time," article by Laura Meckler, Associated Press, April 13, 2001.}

- On patterns of out-of-wedlock births: "Across the country, the fastest growing percentage of out-of-wedlock births is among white women, according to Jennifer Manlove, who did a study for Child Trends. 'What we are seeing is an increase since 1970 among white women and a decrease among black women, and the rate for Hispanic women, collected since 1990, has stabilized,' Manlove said. 'So the latest increase in non-marital childbearing has been driven by white women and older women, ages 25 and up. And the vast majorities of the pregnancies were not planned.'" {"Births Add to Delta's Blues," article by Dahleen Glanton, *Chicago Tribune*, March 26, 2001.}

- On teen attitudes toward marriage and other family-related issues: "American high school seniors remain strongly supportive of marriage, with more than 80 percent saying they expect to be married some day, says a researcher who recently analyzed 15 years of data on youth attitudes. Views of other family-related issues are shifting, however, said Brett V. Brown of Child Trends, a nonpartisan research group in the District. There is more approval of cohabiting before marriage, less stigma attached to unwed parents, and more support for mothers working, he said." {"Teens continue to favor marriage," article by Cheryl Wetzstein, *The Washington Times*, May 6, 2001.}

Afterword

Ultimately, all of Child Trends' work is in the service of America's children. The data that we collect and analyze; the reports, briefs, articles, and news releases that we produce; the information that we post on our Web site; the presentations that we give at scholarly and public policy meetings; the collaborations that we form with other researchers and organizations; the service that we provide to foundations and government agencies; the interviews that we give to the media — all of this — is connected to our compelling mission. That mission, on its most elemental level, is to improve the lives of children and families. The tool we use to carry out this mission is rigorous, research-based information. And the inspiration for wielding that tool is what we regard as a "self-evident" truth: *Children matter, and their well-being is intrinsically important.*

Endnotes

[1]The National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies (NEWWS).

[2]Moore, K.A., & Zaslow, M.J. (2001, November). *Children and welfare reform.* Presentation to the Child Trends Board of Directors and National Advisory Board, Washington, DC.

[3]The Ford Foundation is the main funder for the compendium.

[4]Halle, T., Moore, K., Greene A., & LeMenestrel, S. (1998). What policy makers need to know about fathers. *Policy & Practice*, December 1998, 21-35.

[5]Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

[6]In the 2002 survey, Child Trends added one new question on child well-being that asks parents about children's accidents or injuries that required medical attention.

[7]Moore, K.A., Hatcher, J.L., Vandivere, S., & Brown, B.V. (2000). *Children's behavior and well-being. Snapshots of America's families II: A view from the nation and 13 states.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute and Child Trends. Available online at http://newfederalism.urban.org/nsaf/child-behavior.html.

[8]Zaslow, M., Moore, K.A., Tout, K., Scarpa, J., & Vandivere, S. (2002). How are children faring under welfare reform? Emerging patterns. In A. Weil & K. Finegold (Eds.), *Welfare reform: The next act.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. See, also, Tout, K., Scarpa, J., & Zaslow, M.J. (2002, March). Children of current and former welfare recipients: Similarly at risk (Research Brief).Washington: DC: Child Trends.

[9]Tout, K., Zaslow, M., Papillo, A.R., & Vandivere, S. (2001). *Early care and education: Work support for families and developmental opportunity for young children* (Assessing the New Federalism, Occasional Paper 51). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute and Child Trends. Available online at http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/op51/occa51.html; Ehrle, J., Adams, G., & Tout, K. (2001). *Who's caring for our youngest children? Child care patterns of infants and toddlers* (Assessing the New Federalism, Occasional Paper 42). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute and Child Trends. Available online at http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/op42/occa42.html; Capizzano, J., & Tout, K. (2000). *Child care patterns of school-age children with employed mothers* (Assessing the New

Federalism, Occasional Paper 41). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute and Child Trends. Available online at http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/op41/occa41.html.

[10]Brown, B.V. (2001, August). *Teens, jobs, and welfare: Implications for social policy* (Research Brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available online at http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/CT_Research_Briefs.pdf.

[11]Wertheimer, R., Long, M., & Vandivere, S. (2001). *Does welfare receipt accompany attitudes that impede success in the labor market?* (New Federalism: National Survey of America's Families, Series B, No. B-37). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute and Child Trends. Available online at http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/series_b/b37/b37.html.

[12]The ANF research teams were not granted interviews in Mississippi.

[13]Vandivere, S., Moore, K.A., & Zaslow, M. (2000). *Children's family environment. Snapshots of America's families II: A view from the nation and 13 states.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute and Child Trends. Available online at http://newfederalism.urban.org/nsaf/family-environ.html.

[14]Compared to children in the nation as a whole, children in Minnesota were more likely to have been read to or told stories, to have parents who volunteered and who were involved in religious activities; and their parents were less likely to display high levels of aggravation in parenting and to report symptoms of poor mental health.

[15]Moore, K.A., Hatcher, J.L.,Vandivere, S., & Brown, B.V. (2000). *Children's behavior and well-being. Snapshots of America's families II: A view from the nation and 13 states.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute and Child Trends.

[16]The National Education Goals Panel (1997). *Getting a good start in school.* Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

[17]Halle, T., Zaslow, M., Zaff, J., Calkins, J., & Margie, N. (2001, October). *School readiness: Helping communities get children ready for school and schools ready for children* (Research Brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available online at http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/SchoolReadiness.pdf. This was actually a second edition, with some updated material. The original was published in August 2000. Much of Child Trends' research on school readiness has been funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

[18]The full names of the reports are *The right start city trends: Conditions of babies and their families in America's largest cities (1990-1998) and The right start state trends: Conditions of babies and their families across the nation (1990-1998).* They are available online at http://www.aecf.org/kids/count/rightstart2/docs/rightstart.htm. The reports used data provided by the National Center for Health Statistics.

[19]See foreword to *The right start city trends: Conditions of babies and their families in America's largest cities (1990-1998).*

[20]Child Trends released an updated version of *The Right Start*, incorporating 1999 data, in February 2002. It is available online at http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/rightstart2002/.

[21]Available online at http://www.chiltrends.org/PDF/FAAG2001.pdf.

[22]Moore, K.A., Miller, B.C., Glei, D., & Morrison, D.R. (1995, June). *Adolescent sex, contraception, and childbearing: A review of the recent research.* Report prepared for and funded by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

[23]Zabin, L.S., Emerson, M.R., Ringers, P.A., & Sedivy, V. (1996). Adolescents with negative pregnancy test results: An accessible at-risk group. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 275*(2), *113-117.*

[24]Halle, T., Zaslow, M., Zaff, J., Calkins, J., & Margie, N. (2000). *Background for community-level work on school readiness: A review of definitions, assessments, and investment strategies.* Report prepared for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

[25]See, http://www.childtrends.org/schoolreadiness.asp.

[26]Jekielek, S., Moore, K.A., Hair, E.C., & Scarupa, H.J. (2002, February). *Mentoring: A promising strategy for youth development* (Research Brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends.

[27]The authors were J.L. Brooks, E.C. Hair, & M.J. Zaslow. The brief is available online at http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/WelfareEditBrief.pdf.

[28]The authors were E. Terry-Humen, J. Manlove, & K.A. Moore. The brief is available online at http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/rb_032601.pdf.

[29]The fact sheet is available online at http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/Hispanicfactsheet2.pdf.

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